



## Permanent Exhibitions

Once inside the Museum, visitors will ascend by the staircase in the central atrium (or by elevator, the building is fully handicapped accessible) to the second floor lobby where they will encounter the Orientation Gallery. This large-screen, continuous loop presentation welcomes and provides a meaningful context for visitors of all backgrounds. Identity will be the bedrock of the visitor's orientation. It will explore the great diversity of Maryland African Americans and the African Diaspora. While a story about Maryland African Americans, it will touch the lives of all with universal themes, hopes and emotions, with a provocative interplay of oral histories, imagery, music and sounds.

Visitors then will climb to the third floor and enter the introductory area of the Permanent Exhibit. There will be three orientation theaters that will use a unifying graphic treatment to introduce visitors to the theme of each gallery: Things Hold, Lines Connect, Building Maryland, Building America, and Strength of Mind.

The **Things Hold, Lines Connect** gallery features the stories of 200 years of slavery that wrenched and sometimes broke the bonds of African American families and communities in Maryland. The exhibit will show how children, men and women were torn from their loved ones, isolated and sold to strangers. It also will explore how African Americans in Maryland continuously created and renewed these same bonds to overcome oppression. In building and sustaining families, communities of worship, neighborhoods, towns and social organizations, the exhibit informs us how Black Marylanders used many tools of survival and self-determination to reinforce their commitment to one another and their country.

We will meet the Dorseys, whose family history extends over two centuries in Maryland. James Dorsey--born in Howard County, a veteran of World War II, a Mason and business owner--nourished his family and community. He has given the Museum the manumission papers of his great-grandfather, Isaac Dorsey, and the finger-indented container in which Isaac literally held his freedom. Through objects and images, the Museum will show visitors the domestic environments--kitchens, sheds and cabins--where slaves resided. Via mechanical interactives, visitors can peer into caches in kitchen walls and under floorboards to see the actual religious artifacts that slaves used for African ceremonies. Visitors will learn about Josiah Henson, whose life (narrated in a 1849 memoir on display) was the model for the title character in Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The story of the 40,000 free African Americans in Maryland during the 1840s will be contrasted with those of the enslaved. The handsome home of the Maynards of Annapolis will seem a world away from the shackles, chains, slave pen door, sales posters and handbills that recount the horror of the Internal Slave Trade. As tobacco plantations declined, Maryland owners sold their slaves to labor in the cotton fields of the Deep South. One of every four African American families was broken apart and slaves such as Arminta Ross and Frederick Bailey made the perilous run to freedom. Better known under her married name of Harriet Tubman, Ross returned to Maryland nineteen times at great personal risk to lead 300 African Americans to freedom. Abandoning his servitude as a ship caulker in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Bailey also escaped to the north, changed his name to Frederick Douglass, and became a champion of abolition and hero to the oppressed. Perhaps more important, visitors will learn about the many Maryland African Americans who purchased freedom for themselves and their families. We will hear Reverend Noah Davis deliver the sermon he gave at churches up and down the East coast, seeking contributions from abolitionists to purchase the freedom of his wife and six children.

The full sweep of Maryland's history will be considered from an African American perspective. Artifacts from churches, benevolent societies, the Masons and vacation communities will show how African Americans used faith and developed institutions to counteract slavery and racism.

Protest placards and banners, images of courthouse scenes and a voting machine will help tell the story of the fight for justice and equality by Lillie Carroll Jackson, her daughter Juanita Jackson and Thurgood Marshall. Lillie is considered by many to be the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" because her methods of combining mass action, court challenges and publicity became models for activists against discrimination. A lawyer for the NAACP, Juanita won cases that desegregated state facilities and the ranks of the City of Baltimore's police, teachers and librarians. Thurgood Marshall, the greatest civil rights lawyer of the twentieth century, attacked Jim Crow across the country and his landmark victory in *Brown vs. Board of Education* ended the segregation of American public schools in 1954. Marshall was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1967 and served until 1991.

A special treat for visitors will be the recreation of the Chambers Barbershop from Annapolis, Maryland. The barbershop was and continues to be a nexus of African American life, where political, social, personal, and cultural issues are discussed with humor and insight in a congenial setting.

In **Building Maryland, Building America**, the Museum will reveal the exploitation and violence used against African American Marylanders who served for more than two centuries as forced labor on plantations, farms, shops, kitchens, iron forges, shipyards, and land and water. Slave labor enriched slaveholders, the state and the nation. Despite the devastations of slavery and oppression, the exhibition will show how African Americans developed valuable skills through their work, which in turn enabled them to move towards opportunity, achievement and success.

African Americans in Maryland have been engaged in three major types of labor: work on the water, tobacco cultivation, and iron working. First person testimony will focus on the skills required for each of these trades. Slaves and free people of African descent continue to be pilots, oyster tongers, cooks, crab pickers, sailors, caulkers, boatmen, longshoremen, boat builders and sail makers. Through interactive devices, visitors will have the opportunity to try their hand at the

difficult task of caulking—seaming ships to keep them watertight--oyster tonging and sail-making as they observe real artifacts.

The “unceasing labor” of tobacco farming will be featured as well, which as it required a massive labor force, promoted slavery. Visitors will listen to audios of tobacco workers as they discuss the industry and its impact on the African American community. In a tobacco barn setting, 20<sup>th</sup> century tobacco implements including tobacco sticks, knives, and a seed planter will be displayed.

Ironwork was an ancient and highly respected art and skill in Africa long before slaves labored for individuals and companies in Maryland furnaces. Visitors will see parts of an ironworks furnace; learn how “pigs” or iron bars were fabricated and how colliers produced the tons of charcoal to fire each furnace. Especially compelling is the story of Philip Reed, the African American slave who supervised the casting in a Bladensburg foundry of the *Statue of Freedom* and the installation of the 5-ton sculpture on the top of the U.S. Capitol. Through photographs, objects and quotations, the Museum will relate more recent stories of African American laborers from the woman cleaning homes as a second job to successful entrepreneurs such as the late Reginald F. Lewis, owner of the billion-dollar TLC Beatrice, and Cathy Hughes, President of Radio One.

The **Strength of Mind** gallery documents the creative spirit of Maryland African Americans. It will reveal the many ancient cultural traditions in music, art, sculpture, storytelling and literature with which Africans arrived in Maryland. In the face of oppression, African American artists used the visual and performing arts to express their personal sense of beauty, to strive for excellence, and to forge a spiritual connection with their creator. Visitors will have the opportunity to discover a unique African American culture through works of art that exert a universal appeal.

We will come to know Benjamin Banneker, the first African American man of science, through excerpts from his Almanac (1792 through 1797), astronomical charts, and a mural featuring an anti-slavery letter Banneker sent to Thomas Jefferson as well as Jefferson’s reply. The establishment of schools, from St. Francis Academy to the distinguished historically black colleges and universities of Maryland, will reveal the educational aspirations of a people once deprived of the right to read.

Through a computer touch-screen/printer interactive display, visitors will have an opportunity to create a quilt of their own and print a copy to serve as memento of their Museum visit.

The literary and performing arts will be addressed, too, with manuscripts, quotes, images and performance footage. When segregation prevented African Americans from taking part in the cultural life of the United States, they created a cultural mecca on Baltimore’s Pennsylvania Avenue, which launched the careers of such notables as Cab Calloway, Billie Holiday, Eubie Blake, Ethel Waters and Chick Webb. Visitors will stroll down a recreated Pennsylvania Avenue and walk into celebrations that range from Hip-hop performers to the Arena Players. In the picture window of The Charm Shop, the most fashionable hats on the Avenue will be displayed.

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## **Collections**

A new institution, the Museum has secured the objects for its Inaugural Exhibition and plans to grow its own collection through donations and acquisitions once it opens to the public. The Museum will ask individuals, organizations and institutions in Maryland and elsewhere to share their treasured artifacts with the public via long-term loans or as outright gifts. The Museum has developed its acquisition and collection policy. To encourage scholarly research, the Museum will catalog and digitize its collection.